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## Abstract

Alberti identifies the great driver of man into society as the deficiency of his unassisted powers to supply his needs. Man's succour is provided on the one hand by the family. On the other, society is conceived as a system for the distribution, among members unacquainted with one another, of goods. The relations, in Alberti's thinking, of these contrasting instruments of support are discussed.

### *Alberti's Third Grace: Familial, Moral and Civil Society*

All the while that exchange has advanced as the mode of social intercourse, other forms of interaction have retreated. Exchange being an essentially mathematical kind of engagement whereby participants are able to put a value on their own side of the account, self-interest always promises to be rewarded. It can come to seem the single end with regard to which people interact socially. This point probably applies generally. However, here, the discussion limits itself to Italy.

There are signs that in Early Modern Italy the ascendancy of the market and the unit of exchange were observable to the degree that the decline of other kinds of social engagement seemed to be threatened. A prominent alternative form, like charitable patronage, can of course be construed as no different –a commercial act, carried out for the sake of the donor's salvation; that is, one utterly self-interested. But, less cynically, it can also be read on occasion as a counter-thrust to the rampaging economy of exchange. Might it not be an action seeking truly to reward others and not the giver? At any rate, there was an argument to be advanced in favour of altruism and liberality, a mode of action that recommended itself alone and disdained advantage. It was one accompanied, it can be imagined, by the dark thought that they were fated to pass from human life.

The relations of social and political engagement, market exchange, and civic and personal virtue were of great concern in early 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italy, especially in Tuscany. Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Leonardo Bruni (c.1370-1444), Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) and Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475) were among those who engaged in debates on the question of their definition and how they interacted.<sup>1</sup> Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), too, enquired into the nature of civil society –its economic activity, its moral character and its political form. He also presented it in observable and allegorical terms.

He recommended a subject for painters, in Book III of *Depictura Dellapittura* (1435-36), *The Three Graces*.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Civic Humanism' was their common ideal, in the coining of Hans Baron. See, Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955. It has been a theme of very considerable historiographical importance, prompting recently the collection of a set of essays putting it to the test. See, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, Edited by James Hankins, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000.

Through these three youthful sisters, to whom Hesiod gave the names Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia, painted smiling and holding hands, dressed in flowing and spotless gowns, the aim was to demonstrate liberality, for one sister gives a kindness, another receives it, and the third gives it back again.<sup>2</sup>

Here was a theme of antique morality that the painter might attempt.<sup>3</sup> Alberti lays out the happy state of things where giving and receiving take place –but not self-interestedly. And not reciprocally; that is, not where just two parties are involved. The gift is returned by the Grace who did not receive it in the first place: the second Grace did not repay a debt to the first. This is a state of liberality. Society is in its most evolved form where liberality prevails. For there to be society of this sort, Alberti must be interested in the welfare of someone with whom he is personally unacquainted, as the third Grace is unknown to the first. That person will gain a measure of security as a result. She also, by having the same thought, contributes to Alberti's. So, for everybody. Society and its epitome, the city, are based upon this projected intelligence –on the recognition of our identity of interest with people whose benevolent existence we take on trust.

Alberti made the same point at the end of Book III of *De Familia*. The discussion has turned to friendship. Giannozzo Alberti, who has been the principal interlocutor in this part of the dialogue, recalls that, in the first place, he had come to visit Ricciardo Alberti and to attend Lorenzo, who was *in extremis*. He was able to do so because a legal proceeding of some sort [in Palagio] at which he intended to represent his friend had been postponed.<sup>4</sup> He will return to the court tomorrow, «...and this work of charity pleases me, to sustain and aid him [my friend] as much as I can in action and word, and [I do] this not so much because I know that he loves me as because I know him to be good and just. For the good all wish themselves to be considered friends, and though they may not be known to you, the good and the virtuous always wish to love and to assist...»<sup>5</sup> It is not acquaintance but virtue that prompts us to charitable behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup>LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, *Opere Volgari*, a cura di Cecil Grayson, Vol.III: *Trattati d'arte, Ludi rerum mathematicarum, Grammatica della lingua toscana, Opuscoli amatori, Lettere*, Bari: Laterza, 1973, *De pictura*, Book III, §54, p.95: «Quid tres illae iuenculae sorores, quibus Hesiodus imposuit nomina Egle, Euphronensis atque Thalia, quas pinxere implexis inter se manibus ridentes, soluta et perlucida veste ornatas, ex quibus liberalitatem demonstratam esse voluere, quod una sororum det, alia accipiat, tertia reddat beneficium.»

<sup>3</sup>The corresponding subject –treating vice rather than virtue– would be the Calumny of Apelles, §53.

<sup>4</sup>LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, *I Libri della Famiglia*, a cura di Ruggiero Romano e Alberto Tenenti, Nuova edizione a cura di Francesco Furlan, Torino: Einaudi Editore, 1994 (ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN), p.194

<sup>5</sup>ID., p.319, l.3748-3753: «...e piacemi questa opera di pietà, sollevarlo [his friend] e aiutarlo con fatti e con parole quanto io posso, e questo non tanto perché conosco lui ama me, quanto perché conosco lui essere buono e giusto. E vogliansi e' buoni tutti riputare amici, e benché a te non siano conoscente, e' buoni e virtuosi vogliansi sempre amare e aiutare.»

Vitruvius describes our first, most primitive social state, right at the edge of the State of Nature where we have dwelt, as he says, like wild beasts.<sup>6</sup> His starting point is hunter-man (the Golden Age, by contrast, contemplates the first, gatherer-man). Centuries on, Hobbes thinks that we have not truly moved beyond it –the multiplied forms of civilization merely veiling or trimming our savage state. However, while acknowledging the ugliness of human nature –of savage man– Vitruvius takes a more positive view of social man. He tells the story of our discovery of fire, bringing our realization of the value of cooperation, the start of our emergence from the aboriginal state of total self-reliance and self-interest, and the first step of our advance towards civilization. The fire of Vitruvius sees us realizing the value of reciprocity in a general sense. I'll put a log on the fire and then you do so too: you warm me and I'll warm you. However, this is not a direct exchange. The crucial novelty is the third element, external to both of us and from which we both derive gratification. Here, it is the fire: it could equally be the flock or the field or the store. Unlike savage man, social man does not thrive at another's expense.

Our companion participates in the common task too –and observably. Around the fire, and close to it in evolutionary terms, prevails a primitive economy. The social existence that Vitruvius conceives at this early stage is limited by the need to be able to verify directly that a member of the group has done his share of the fire-feeding. The equality that exists within it makes for peace and benevolence. The band will not be numerous, for surveillance must never nod, to be infected by doubt, as happens in larger groups. This is a family in theory and sentiment, a group whose bonds are convivial (in the Latinate sense of the word) –to be contrasted with the family in reality, where consanguinity is the connection.

In this early social arrangement, the group is more than the blood-bound family. There, relations are without that balance of give-and-take that defines economic society. In the family, siblings may squabble, but mother, father, sisters and brothers give and take without any developed sense of equity. In Vitruvius's nascent society, by contrast, the looser bonds of the group or tribe or clan must rest on the firm grounds of fairness. That is, of course, a moral and rational perception. In other words, as the fire is external to all the individuals of the group and is a care they have in common, objectivity has entered the scene –it is a concept (a good) as well as a thing in itself– and the event of its discovery coincides with the awakening of human self-realization, the acquisition of intellect.

Where Vitruvius presents the scene as a historic one, it is, of course, as Hobbes's receptiveness to the general notion of the savage in man indicates, perennial in the economics it describes. The present discussion, then, cannot insist that the past is entirely another country. It must be allowed to touch upon thinking that we treat as historically unconditioned.

If a person only has reciprocal encounters to sustain his benevolence, his security only extends to his immediate circle. It is a pre-urban state of things and does not constitute society evolved much beyond its first primitive beginnings. Though physically we may live in the city, in our conduct we may yet live a pre-urban life.

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<sup>6</sup>VITRUVIUS, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, translated by Morris Hicky Morgan, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1960, Book II, Chapter 1, pp.38-39

People who seek to extend their circle by means of direct bonds of loyalty and advantage and who will not adopt the projected intelligence referred to above, may exist in the modern epoch: but they do not live—that is, act—in it. They betray, or at any rate, compromise political society and the city, whose key feature is its crucial impersonality. Patronage systems work on the primitive principle of invigilated reciprocity. It is the *modus operandi* of the Mafia. The famous claim that «It's business» is skewed. It's personal. So, the peace and benevolence that are to be found at this level of reciprocity are not truly moral states of existence or sentiments. Back-scratching is not moral action, for it is without trust and hope, containing, as it does, the guarantee of reward for labour. Morality exists where reward is unpredictable, and some sort of measure must be applied. Sentiments around the perfect reciprocity of the one-to-one relationship, or the wider but invigilated one, are no more than detached instances of the agreeable.

These people also betray or compromise the condition that is prior to the city and political society, namely the town and moral society. Within moral society there prevails a moral economy where the self-evident evils of bribe and threat as the instruments of social cohesion must be repudiated. As Vitruvius's scene expands, a more developed notion of society emerges, this time with, at its core, exchange, a freely-entered relationship replacing the more coercive one with which we began—for woe betide whoever would have shirked his duty to feed the fire, or tend the sheep, do his share of the husbandry, guard the store. At length, our numbers have increased to the point where we cannot perform our invigilated task or make an equitable distribution of its rewards. There was an optimum number in the convivial little tribe. We have now multiplied as groups: but coming together on market day to barter our goods is not too distant from our first gathering round the fire. The market is the candid scene of distribution, as the fire distributed its warmth. I, who have a sheep and want a goat, rejoice in the equity of my transaction with the man who has the goat and wants the sheep. After the anxiety of the search, our encounter was one of mutual delight. To the extent that we have given and received happiness, our actions can seem to have had—albeit primitively—a moral character. However, to repeat, our delight was quite unconnected with generosity in either party. It was merely the opposite of the want and surplus that gave us both pain.

The market becomes, of course, much more efficient when I can split the transaction in two. If I can dispose of my surplus sheep in one contact and acquire my needed goat in another—make two halves of the equity—I shall find the two contacts much more readily than the one. This division has been made possible by the unit of exchange. I sell the sheep for a sum, and I buy the goat for one.

At the same time as the unit of exchange comes into existence, moral life expands. By «moral» we mean no more than those feelings, pleasurable and disagreeable, that emerge with social conduct in a world in which value is not constant and predictable. I was relieved of the pain of my surplus in one transaction, and of what I lacked, in the other. And a crucial speculative element appears. I used to be delighted to encounter the person with my surplus and need in mirror image. It may be that mine was a fine sheep and his was a poor goat; but we had no real way of registering the difference in quality. It was probably invisible to us. Our exchange was not accompanied by fully moral considerations either because there was no degree to our

satisfaction, and morality is essentially a matter of setting actions upon a scale of some sort. It is in this respect that the moral is also the aesthetic, a matter essentially of evaluation or comparison. Now, in the market using a unit of exchange, as well as the relief of the pains of surplus and deficiency, one transaction is attended by a shadow of fear and the other by one of anger. The fear comes with the thought that I may not have enough money to buy the goat or may be unable to buy one of sufficient quality. The anger comes with the seed of doubt that I have paid too much for this goat. The unit of exchange is interested in quality; there is a good goat and a poor one. This power of discrimination is of a certain ethical and therefore moral character. Again, the moral and the aesthetic are connected. These emotions—fear and anger—signify that the market has acquired a moral climate. It resides in our sense of the instability of the value of commodities in relation to one another because of the stability of the unit of exchange, and in themselves, depending upon whether they are in scarce supply or glut. In foresight and hindsight there is this unease or unhappiness. When the transactions have been successfully completed, to that extent, I am happy. But the accompanying unhappinesses paradoxically enrich my life beyond the undifferentiated Edenic agreeableness of my earlier economic existence.

If the market acquires a moral character when a unit of exchange appears, the society that emerges through the notion of exchange has moral character too. We have more than our common comfort—the fire—with which to concern ourselves. There is a service I can offer and there is a requirement that I have. As in the crude market, there is little chance of my finding another person with his ability to do a service while standing in need of one in mirror-image of mine.

Alberti discovers a sort of market of a more amplified kind. I can gratify my deficiency and benefit another by disbursing what I have in surplus. Within the moral economy that he describes above by means of the Three Graces is a round of giving, receiving and returning to the first giver. As in the market of the unit of exchange, the individual gives and receives a service, but they are not from the same person. Of crucial importance is the invisibility of the connection between the person whom I serve and the person from whom I receive service. In the allegorical version of the exchange system, Alberti reduces the number in the transaction to the smallest—three. The sheep, the unit of exchange and the goat stand in a similar relationship. The unit of exchange made the sheep and the goat invisible to one another. But there was a difference, and it was one upon which Alberti fixed. The moral character of the society of exchange was limited by the economy of self-interest which required that the price be just right. That character is little more than an unintended consequence. The concept of altruism, however, demands that morality of the purest kind be the driver of society. Alberti did not intend that commerce should prevail in all circumstances. The advance of the market economy—when nothing is to be got for nothing—sees the enfeeblement of the moral economy. A champion of moral steel was needed. It was the role of liberality—which steadfastly refuses to calculate advantage—to set a limit on that advance and, in the end, be commerce's nemesis. The cynic can accuse Alberti of utopianism: self-interest cannot be driven from a money economy. But Alberti would observe that barter or the unit of exchange oversee reciprocity. Reciprocity cannot, of itself, resolve the prior situation that Alberti has in view.

He describes the liberal state of things without recourse to allegory in *Defamilia*, in the voice of Lionardo Alberti:

...nature willed it that where I might be deficient, you would make good the shortcoming, and in another instance you would lack what another might have. Why is this? So that I should have need of you, and you of him, he of another, and some other of me. In this way one man's need for another serves as the cause and means to keep us all united in open friendship and alliance. And it was this necessity perhaps, that was the origin and basis of the establishment of civil society and of the construction of the legal system, much more than, as has been said, fire or water was the cause of such a great interconnected union of mortals bound in law, reason and custom.<sup>7</sup>

Any number of people might have been giving and receiving services in the round that finally arrives back at Alberti, and supplies him with what he needed. A transaction or a number of transactions to which he was not party have taken place, and his first act of dispensing his surplus at last receives its reward in his being provided with what he needed. In the totality of participants in the moral economy of giving and receiving service is society proper. In the balance of deficiencies and surpluses across a number of social individuals engaged in exchange there prevails a sentiment. The emotions that it sifts are not the fear and anger of the monetary exchange. Instead, he arrives with the possibility of liberality and gratitude as his moral conditions. They have been fulfilled in a sentiment of charity given and received. Clearly, the moral economy exists in a state of plenty, and no one seeks profitable advantage. Battista, the principal interlocutor, in *De iciarchia*, states, «Finally, the existence and continuance both of the family and of the city subsists in the availability and sufficiency of necessities, whatever they might be, supplied by nature.»<sup>8</sup>

He meditates on the same point where money exists, in Book I, saying, «...money cannot be useful to you if others do not already have some desire or need whereby

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7ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN, p.166, l.1886-1895: «...volse [la natura] che in quello in quale io manco, ivi tu supplisca, e in altra cosa manchi la quale sia apresso di quell' altro. Perché questo? Perch' io abbia di te bisogno, tu di colui, colui d'uno altro, e qualche uno di me, e così questo aver bisogno l'uno uomo dell'altro sia cagione e vinculo e conservarci insieme con publica amicizia e congiunzione. E forse questa necessità fu essordio e principio de fermare le republike, di costituirvi le leggi molto più che come diceva [...] fuoco o d'acque essere stato cagione di tanta fra gli uomini e sì con legge, ragione e costumi colligata unione de' mortali.» See also, RENÉE NEU WATKINS, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1969, p.137: «...nature planned that where I might be weak, you would make good the deficiency, and in some way you would lack the virtue found in another. Why this? So that I should have need of you, and you of him, he of another, and some other of me. In this way one man's need for another serves as the cause and means to keep us all united in general friendship and alliance.»

<sup>8</sup>LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, *Opere Volgari*, a cura di Cecil Grayson, Vol. II: *Rime e trattati morali*, Bari: Laterza, 1966, *De iciarchia*, Book III, p.266-267, l.35-3: «Ultimo, quello che contiene l'essere e perseveranza insieme sì delle famiglie sì delle città si è l'uso e sufficienza delle cose necessarie e devute alla natura, qualunque elle siano.»

you can convert your money into their labour or products.»<sup>9</sup> Alberti is remarkably close to Adam Smith here in insisting upon the posteriority of money.

Alberti goes on to picture the next state of things in *Defamilia*, as we saw above in the form of the «great interconnected union of mortals bound in law, reason and custom.» The implication is that custom gives rise to reason and reason, to laws. But he does not expose the mechanics of the process. We are left with evolution as the explanation, and continuity rendering arbitrary the categoric distinction that should be drawn between moral society and civil society. Indeed, it may be that Alberti does not see categoric distinctions between the three kinds of society that are being discussed here. By using the family as the building block of society in *Defamilia*, he implicitly denies them distinct categoric realms. The family, no matter how incorporated and fitted to advanced economic operation, retains memory of its pre-social and pre-economic existence as the narrow consanguineous circle. By putting its interest first, the acts of kindness between its member fall short of altruism, for there is no giving without benefit sought for the whole. But it will be a more evolved family if it will recognise its advantage in the peace of the society at large. At any rate, the pattern of moral society is indeed the same as that of civil society, which embraces the totality of relationships and makes the vast majority of them invisible to members of that society. The invisibility of the multitude of benefactors in society conceived as a moral economy, matching in the mechanics of its operation the market with a unit of exchange, recurs in civil society.

Alberti had conceived of moral society in terms of the Graces and of the villa.

Managed with diligence and love, it never wearies of repaying you. Reward follows reward. In spring the farm gives you a multitude of delights; greenery, flowers, aromas, songs. It tries to please you, it smiles and promises you a magnificent harvest, it fills you with good hopes as well as sufficient joy in the present. Then in summer how courteously it attends on you! First one sort of fruit, then another, comes to your house - your house is never empty of some gift. Then there is autumn: now the farm gives liberal reward for your labors, shows great gratitude for your merit - gladly, copiously, and faithfully serves you! Twelfefold reward is yours - for a little sweat, many casks of wine.<sup>10</sup>

There is an invisible magic-worker here. A generous and fecund spirit converts our small labour into the plenty that comes to our door. In the villa and the emblem of liberality –the Three Graces– Alberti presents a moral economy distinct from a

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<sup>9</sup>*De iciarchia*, Book I, p.214, l.3-5: «...l'oro non potrà essere utile a te, se prima in altri non viene qualche voglia o bisogno pel quale tu commuti l'oro tuo coll'opere e cose sue.»

<sup>10</sup>ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN, Book III, pp.244-245, l.1515-1527: «Se tu la governi con diligenza e con amore, mai a lei parerà averti soddisfatto; sempre aggiunge premio a' premii. Alla primavera la villa ti dona infiniti sollazzi, verzure, fiori, odori, canti; sforzasi in piu modi farti lieto, tutta ti ride e ti promette grandissima ricolta, émpietti di buona speranza e di piaceri assai. Poi e quanto la truovi tu teco cortese! Ella ti manda a casa ora uno, ora un altro frutto, mai ti lascia la casa vòta di qualche sua liberalità. Eccoti poi presso l'autunno. Qui rende la villa alle tue fatiche e a' tuoi meriti smisurato premio e copiosissimo mercé, e quanto volentieri e quanto abundate, e con quanta fede! Per uno dodici, per uno piccole sudore più e più botte di vino.» See also R.N. WATKINS, p.191-192.



money economy. It achieves a satisfactory distribution of the goods that we require without descending to the meanness of the balancer of the books (and without the cupidity of the seeker of profits). If the crudest society was near to the State of Nature, the moral society is close to the state of horticulture and agriculture. Nature is viewed in an altogether kinder light.

And civil society comes next. In itself, it is based on neither reciprocity nor morality, but it embraces them in abstract and ideal form. That is, they will be present, but they do not shape the society. The first, Vitruvian, society has been called convivial or invigilated. The second, moral society, self-regulates in conditions of peace and plenty. The third deals with less benign conditions. Civil society keeps the peace between men of a more Hobbesian kind. It assumes limited resources that need to be distributed in an orderly way. Regulation is required: however, it is not coercive (the treatment of delinquents is a separate matter). Rather, the citizens have collaborated in creating the instruments or institutions that govern them impersonally and without favour. It is possible to propose the rather contradictory concept of impersonal benevolence where civil society is concerned. That concept is, of course, justice, a resolution forged on the anvil of reason. Alberti was thinking of something like this when he wrote of society «bound in law, reason and custom.» Law is the fulfilment of objectivity in the government of our affairs. Custom is sustained within social intercourse. Reason aims at consensus unsustained by social intercourse. Law stands aloof from our quibbles.

Punitive justice is invented to deal with those who do not participate in civil society. In the Renaissance period, as is so well illustrated in the *Good and Bad Government* frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Sala dei Nove of the Palazzo della Signoria of Siena, the state recognized its task to administer justice. There should be satisfaction for us in having the state, or society, standing behind us as we receive satisfaction upon the person who has wronged us. Blood money or vendetta continue to gratify us only because we fail to acknowledge the security that we have in our benefactors being legion and unknown to us.

What distinguished the society of need and service from that of custom, reason and law is difficult to glean from Alberti's writings, but he does have a clear conception of what civil society is. Or rather, he is very clear about what is destructive of it, and from that clarity of thought is to be construed his understanding. In the prologue to Book I of *Defamilia*, he is very cogent on the point. Families, like commonwealths and empires, thrive or decline: society in its ascendancy consists in the universal pursuit of common cause. The empire of Alexander the Great serves as the first case to introduce ancient Rome, modern Italy and the Alberti family as prominent instances of decline following triumph. Famously, Alexander's empire was divided among his generals, and collapse was swift.

Indeed, after the death of Alexander the Great, as soon as the Macedonian princes started each to procure advantages for themselves, and to care not for the public realm but attend to their private fiefdoms, discord soon arose among them. So, then, not fortune but stupidity brought to an end the felicity of the

Macedonians and they found themselves presently without empire and without glory.<sup>11</sup>

Unity is opposed to division. In Book VII, Chapter 5, of *Dereædificatoria*, Alberti reports an almost incantatory passage, striking repeatedly on the single or unitary and marking the perfect condition of a people, this time, under Moses. It is a law of the Hebrews:

Have but one principal and sacred city ...in it construct one temple with one altar ...you should be one people, of common feeling and common purpose ... and defended by a single god.<sup>12</sup>

The general moral point that Alberti takes from the case of the Macedonians is that self-interest leads to decline. It is the instinct that is opposed to the social. The point is one that he returns to frequently in his writings. Civil society depends, then, upon self-denial, and acts through instruments that are not to be deflected from their task by individual selfishness. It is clear to see how destructive of empires and commonwealths are tyrannies, which turn the instruments of state into those of individual will and appetite.

Institutions themselves are no less vulnerable. What has been described above in rough outline is one of Alberti's most important conceptual tools –his notion of society possessing its dynamic principle in our commitment to it as an abstraction. The common life, the commonwealth and the common table are its theatre. The Church should have the character of civil society. That, for Alberti, it did not, its collapse was certain.

It might seem that civil society would have to be democratic and egalitarian. Does it involve then the dethroning of monarchs? Whilst there are indeed inequalities and curtailments of liberties that civil society does not permit, there are others that he allows to be consistent with the rule of princes. Battista, in the late dialogue, *De idiarchia*, describes the consensual society where all submit to the law, and says that the role of the prince is to exercise coercive command only where people within the

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<sup>11</sup>ID, p.5, l.64-81: «Vero, doppo la morte d'Allessandro Grande, subito ch' e principi macedoni cominciarono a procurare e' suoi propri beni, e aversi solliciti non al publico imperio, ma curiosi a' privati regni, fra loro subito nacquero discordie.[...] Così adunque finirono non la fortuna, ma loro stultizia e' Macedoni la conseguita sua felicità, e trovonsi in poco tempo senza imperio e senza gloria.» See R.N. WATKINS, p.26-27: «True it is that after the death of Alexander the Great, as soon as the Macedonian kings began to pursue only their private good and to care not for the public empire but for their own kingdoms discord arose ... among them, [...] Thus the Macedonians destroyed, not by fortune but by folly, the happiness they had attained. Soon they found themselves without empire and without glory.»

<sup>12</sup>LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, *L'Architettura [De re ædificatoria]*, a cura di Giovanni Orlandi, introduzione e note di Paolo Portoghesi, Milano: Polifilo, 1966, Book VII, Chapter 5, p.559: «Sit ... vobis una primaria et sacra civitas ...in ea struito templum unicum, altare unicum ... una enim gens uno consensu et instituto ... una erit deo tuta et munita.» The translation here differs very slightly from that in Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by JOSEPH RYKWERT, NEIL LEACH and ROBERT TAVERNOR, Cambridge, Mass./London: M.I.T. Press, 1988, p.198-99 [RYKWERT *et alii*]. Here, 'purpose' is given for 'undertaking.'

society do not obey.<sup>13</sup> The prince's role in normal circumstances is laid out: «The king, insofar as kingship is command, makes clear to his people how much and in what ways one should be just, temperate, strong and honest in order to live well and not useless to others and to oneself, and in this way he will fulfil his duty...»<sup>14</sup> Not the obedience of the ruled proves the prince, but the nature of the order that he gives. It will not be inconsistent with justice and liberty among the citizens: «So it follows that sovereignty does not concede the right to impose new kinds of servitude upon others, but imposes upon that person who rules the civil necessity to conserve the liberty and dignity of the *patria* and the peace of her private citizens.»<sup>15</sup> Battista had earlier considered the ruler who would rather be feared than loved; so it is possible that Machiavelli knew this text or its argument and reversed its pious principles in his own cynical tract, *Il Principe*<sup>16</sup> There is in addition, demanded of the prince by Alberti, something that he cannot shirk. That is his selfless attention to the needs of the state and her citizens (or his subjects). The demand is not made by the citizens as a group of individuals, for then the prince would be attending upon the mob. Rather, it is made by the citizens who pool their common purpose in the form of the abstraction, which is the institution of the state. Alberti describes the selfless ruler in the *Intercentale*, «Servus», in which the argument is made that the master is the servant of his household, and therefore also of the servants. The *paterfamilias* is a form of the prince. It is a matter of doing one's duty. The prince is something of a teacher in that he instructs the people that they should live honestly, with fortitude, with temperance and justice and should be helpful to their fellows, «and so he will satisfy his duty, obedient to the servitude placed upon him by the law.»<sup>17</sup> In Book III of *De iarchia*, Alberti allows that in the family or in the city there are two classes – the many and the few. It is the task of the few to direct policy, to initiate enterprises,

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<sup>13</sup>*De iarchia*, p.194, l.12-25: «Costui adunque publico e primo magistrato, e insieme il numero de' privati cittadini, se vorranno vivere bene e beati in summa tranquillità e quiete, converrà ch'egli osservino equità e onestà fra loro quanto comandi la legge. Questa ragione di comandare, se tutti saranno modesti e ben sensati, pare a me sarà non altro che uno essortarli, confermarli, solleccarli che sequitino facendo pur bene come per loro essi fanno. E sarà, dico, questa essortazione officio di vera amicizia e compiuta carità più che arrogante elazione, cupidità d'imporre servile condizione agli altri. Contro, se forse saranno improbi scellerati, el dir tuo "fa e non fare" nulla gioverebbe. Resta per questo al principe che lui ubbidisca alle legge, e sia ministro della severità castigando chi erra e provvedendo alla quiete degli altri levando di mezzo la corruttela e peste de' viziosi.»

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, Book III, p.194, l.30-33: «El re in quanto re comanda, cioè ricorda a' suoi quanto e dove bisogni aversi iusto, temperato e forte e onesto per vivere bene e non inutile agli altri e anche a sé, e così satisfarà all'officio suo ...»

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*: «Così sequita che il principato non concede arbitrio d'imponere nuova servitù agli altri, ma impone a chi lo regge necessità civile di conservare libertà e dignità alla patria e quiete a' privati cittadini.»

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, Battista, near the beginning of Bk.I, p.192, l.14-17: «E che furore fia questo degli animi bestiali, se vorranno più essere temuti che amati? Quanti saranno che temano te, tanti odieranno te. Se tu sarai odiato da molti, per certo a te sarà necessario temer molti.»

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.194, l.30-33: «...e così satisfará all officio suo ubbidendo alla servitá impostali dalle legge.»

to deliver the ship of state over rough seas safely to harbour. He refers to, «The duty of those more suited to conduct both themselves and others to the best and most desirable end.»<sup>18</sup> Or, as the interlocutor Paolo says, «It seems useful and indeed necessary to us that every multitude should have someone in charge.»<sup>19</sup> This master who serves and captain who obeys has much in common with the monastic superior in the Rule of St Augustine:

Your superior should not take pleasure in ruling you but rather in serving you with all charity. While the honor you pay him exalts him in your eyes, let fear prostrate him at your feet before God. He should give an example of good works to all. Let him correct the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, comfort the sick, be patient with all. Let him observe the rule with cheerfulness himself and cause others to observe it by the reverence he inspires. And though both are necessary, still it should rather be his desire to be loved than feared by you...<sup>20</sup>

Alberti develops the idea of government in civil society –as opposed to its power of self-regulation– by observing the microcosmic case, the family. «As far as I can make out from nature, it seems that the city, as it is made up of many families, is in itself like one very large family, and, equally, the family is as-it-were a small city.»<sup>21</sup> As is argued in «Servus», there is need for governors and governed to identify with the good of the family. As, in the household, the head is a vigilant overseer, prompt in his response to circumstances, the *paterfamilias* also understands his task as being to make himself lovable to his children in their recognition that their own welfare and happiness is his aim. Alberti relishes the contradiction resolved: the governor serves; the commander obeys.<sup>22</sup> In one guise, he identifies the good of the social group (it might, for the father, be the family), in the other, the sanctity of the Law. Their actions are essentially virtuous, and in that they are something of an imitation of Christ's. The person who lives self-sacrificially gives from out of a resource that cannot be diminished. *Virtú*, *sapienza* and *bontá* are resources of this kind.<sup>23</sup>

Alberti is emphatic in arguing that virtue is a matter of will. It belongs to whoever wishes to have it. For example, he writes, in *De iciarchia*, «He who does not seek his own good, cares nothing for it, and who cares not merits not.»<sup>24</sup> He repeats just what

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p.268, l.14-15: «l'officio de' più atti a inducere e sé e gli altri a fine ottimo e desideratissimo.»

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.269, l.11-12: «Parci utile certo e necessario a ogni moltitudine avere chi la governi.» Alberti makes the point similarly in Book VII, Chapter 1 of *De re aedificatoria* (RYKWERT *et alii*, p.189): «It is said Saturn ... realized that just as we put a shepherd and not one of the cattle in charge of the herd, similarly another race of beings, far superior in wisdom and virtue should be left in command of human communities.»

<sup>20</sup><http://www.domcentral.org/trad/rule.htm>

<sup>21</sup>*De iciarchia*, p.266, l.8-11: «Quanto m'occorre dalla natura, pare a me che la città com'è costituita da molte famiglie, così ella in sé sia quasi come una ben grande famiglia; e contro, la famiglia sia quasi una picciola città.»

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, see p.272

<sup>23</sup>*ut supra*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, Book III, p.199, l.3-4: «Chi non cerca il ben suo, non lo cura: chi non lo cura, non lo merita.»

he wrote in the prologue to *Defamilia* all those years earlier: «Only he who does not want it is without virtue.»<sup>25</sup> His own good is not the same as his self-interest. Again, Alberti is carving out territory where the commercial rule does not apply. The commercial principle always involves, stated or implicitly, the Latin word 'ut' –in order that– a proximate or eventual advantage to oneself. The end directs the act, and to that extent, the act is not freely willed. The thing that is wished for its own sake, however, stands beyond the reach of the rule. The good father wishes the good of his family. Similarly, if the prince will define himself in relation to the good of the citizens and if the citizens can trust in the virtue, benevolence and justice of the prince, none would wish to be elsewhere than in the society they share. These are goods in themselves.

This prince defines himself here not by his magnificence, but by his liberality, and it is the role of liberality –at any rate in domestic as opposed to foreign policy– that Alberti is at pains here to demonstrate. Thus, the paterfamilias and the prince share a power, and the family and the state are again alike.

It seems that, from his consideration of society as the sum of families or as a great family in itself, Alberti has missed the point that impersonality is the essential property of civil society –the family, we recall, being an invigilated scene. But, in fact, no sooner has he stated the point than he recognises that, in its dependence upon sentiment deriving from consanguinity, it is inadequate to account for the larger society: «But perhaps thereafter cities arose spontaneously and for no other reason than for living together in sufficiency and comfort.»<sup>26</sup> In Book III of *Defamilia*, Giannozzo explains the working of the family and Lionardo attempts to apply his points to the larger society. In this discussion, such a society would belong to the town rather than the city. Whilst the family comes about in a spirit of «piety and love and a certain sense of duty required by nature towards its members»,<sup>27</sup> the town is the resort more of the self-interested than the benevolent. However, he says, the existence and survival of both proceeds from their ability to supply our necessities and what nature provides, and utilities.

In fact, for Alberti, society or the commonwealth or republic is not constituted simply as the sum of its families. The family is not an independent element of society, but an element within society. That is, society is the medium of the family, and the satisfactory condition of that medium is of crucial importance for its welfare. He makes the point right at the beginning of *Defamilia* that that condition is the product of families' extraverterd conduct. In the prologue, he lists ancient Roman families: «They stood in our land for the public good...» They, in their nobility, maintain the public good, and they inhabit the society where it prevails, «...for the maintenance of liberty, and for the conservation of authority and dignity in peace

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<sup>25</sup>R.N. WATKINS, Book III, p.17: ROMANO TENENTI, FURLAN, p.10, l.220-221: «Solo é senza virtù chi nolla vuole.»

<sup>26</sup>*De iciarchia.*, Book III, p.266, l.27-29: «Ma furono poi le città costituite forse a caso, e non per altro ragione che solo per vivere con sufficienza e commodità insieme.»

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, l.31-2: «pietà e carità e certo officio richiesto dalla natura verso e' suoi.»

and in war.»<sup>28</sup> Thus the interest of the family is not the immediate achievement of its single destiny, but the conditions in which that goal might be realised. Lionardo Alberti says,

I agree with you that the good citizen will love tranquillity, but no more his own than that of others, will take pleasure in private leisure but no less in that of his fellow citizens, will desire the unity, composure peace and tranquillity of his own family but even more that of his country and state.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, this moral state of things is the condition of liberality, as it was in the allegory of the Graces. Giannozzo, at the end of Book III, makes the point that it is not reciprocity that maintains the peace in the larger society but the casting of virtue upon the waters: «Good men should all consider themselves friends. Even if you do not know them personally, you should always love and help good and virtuous men.»<sup>30</sup> Such is the first Grace's relationship with the third. That environment whose healthfulness was so important for the family traces its origins back to the fire of Vitruvius, the ground upon which cooperation stood.

Alberti, then, makes a sustained argument for social intercourse defiant of commercial values and self-interest. Labour and desert receive, happily, incalculable reward where liberality prevails. However, it is difficult to think that he makes the argument in a sanguine frame of mind. Rather, he makes it against the social current, which is towards selfishness and greed. Self-interest can hide and disguise itself so effectively; its viciousness can be difficult to expose. In the primitive society described by Vitruvius it did not exist, for every action was invigilated by all. The societies that followed included, essentially, the unobserved acts of giving and receiving. The third Grace can personify them. However, she has a sister. Self-interest is her unvirtuous sibling. Where the one acted unobserved, the other operates in secret. The advantage that the «Disgrace» who operates in secret has over she who, for her part, operates openly is huge. Envy and pride preside over her inner life and prompt her every action. Perhaps, emulation residing in the darkest recesses of her heart, she is Ambition. At any rate, that secret desire for advantage over others is the origin of social catastrophe. For example, Battista, in *Cena familiaris* makes the point: «From contention arises rivalry, from rivalry bull-headedness, from bull-headedness injury, from injury offence and strife and [the clash of] arms.»<sup>31</sup> Alberti pictured the

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<sup>28</sup>R.N. WATKINS, Book III, p.13; ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN, p.3, l.19-21: «... così nella nostra terra assai state per lo ben publico a mantenere la libertà, a conservare l'autorità e dignità della patria in pace e in Guerra ...»

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, op.cit., p.48: ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN, p.225, l.946-952: «E affermovi che il buono cittadino amerà la tranquillità, ma non tanto la sua propria, quanto ancora quella degli altri buoni, goderà negli ozii privati, ma non manco in quello degli altri cittadini suoi, desiderà l'unione, quiete, pace e tranquillità della casa sua propria, ma molto più quella della patria sua e della repubblica.»

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p.115: ROMANO, TENENTI, FURLAN, p.319, l.3751-3753: «E voglionsi e' buoni tutti riputare amici, e benché a te non siano conoscenti, e' buoni e virtuosi voglionsi sempre amare e aiutare.»

<sup>31</sup>C. GRAYSON, I, p. 348, l.28-30: «Del contendere surge gara, della gara ostinazione, della ostinazione ingiuria, della ingiuria iurgio e rissa e arme.» The *Intercenale*, «Nebule» (LEON

allegorical representation of the third Grace's evil counterpart in the *Intercenale*, «Paintings»:

...a woman with a haughty brow, swelling breast, insolent mien. Dressed in regal garments, she blows into a broken trumpet, which curves back towards her face and pours murky smoke in her eyes. With her other hand, she points a finger at jewels and golden vases encrusted with reliefs, which have been thrown on the ground.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps half-remembered is an allegorical figure that he could have seen while a young student in Padua. In the Arena Chapel, among the seven vices, Giotto painted *Invidia*. From out of her mouth comes a snake which turns back to bite her forehead. It could be mistaken for a trumpet. There follow in Alberti's text, descriptions of Ambition's daughter Contention, her grand-daughter Vengeance and the last of the offspring, Calamity.

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BATTISTA ALBERTI, *Dinner Pieces*, A Translation of the *Intercenales* by David Marsh, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies *In conjunction with* The Renaissance Society of America: Binghamton, New York, 1987, p.172-175) traces a similar process of disaster beginning in ambition.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p.55